

Growing in God's Love

A Story Bible Curriculum

Who Is Jesus?



Growing in God's Love

A Story Bible Curriculum

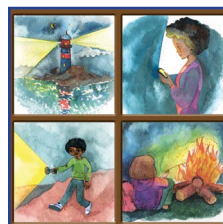
Unit Overview and Connecting page written by Carol A. Wehrheim
Sessions written by Anita Peebles

Who Is Jesus?

Introduction	2
Unit Overview	3
Intergenerational and Home Ideas	4



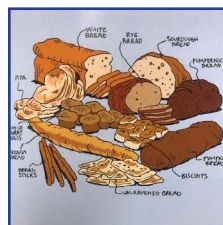
The Good Shepherd 9
John 10:11-16



The Light of the World 21
John 8:12



The True Vine 15
John 15:1-8



The Bread of Life 25
John 6:35-37

The free At-Home Kit Guide provides instructions and suggestions for at-home faith formation. Download it at www.pcusastore.com/StoryBibleCurriculum or www.thethoughtfulchristian.com/StoryBibleCurriculum. Click on the unit title, and then click on the download button found at the bottom of the product page for this unit.

© 2022 Westminster John Knox Press

First edition
Published by Westminster John Knox Press
Louisville, Kentucky

All rights reserved. Except where permission to photocopy is expressly granted on the material, no part of these materials may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. For information, address Westminster John Knox Press, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202-1396.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and are used by permission. In some instances, adaptations have been made to make the language inclusive. Scripture quotations marked CEB are from the Common English Bible, © 2011 by Common English Bible, and are used by permission.

Every effort has been made to determine whether texts are under copyright. If through an oversight any copyrighted material has been used without permission and the publisher is notified of this, acknowledgment will be made in future printings.

Printed in the United States of America

Connecting

🌱 **Goal:** To explore how Jesus is the good shepherd in our lives and in our world.

Connecting with the Biblical Text

The metaphor of God as the good shepherd is found in the Old Testament, the most recognizable reference being Psalm 23, the best known of all the psalms. This image is not unexpected in an agrarian, herding economy. Jesus uses this metaphor for himself in the text for this session. In this passage and the preceding verses, he is clear about the difference between himself, the Good Shepherd, and those shepherds who cannot be trusted.

For a brief commentary on this passage and a way of thinking about the “I am” texts from John, visit bit.ly/GLJohn10.

Connecting with the World

Consider: Which sheep in the world need a good shepherd? Who are the good shepherds?

- 🌱 A good shepherd may be someone who takes special care of a certain population. For example, during World War II, Raoul Wallenberg helped many Hungarian Jewish children escape from Eastern Europe and death. Read about him on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website at bit.ly/GLHolocaustMemorial.
- 🌱 A good shepherd may be an organization, such as Living Waters, which focuses on providing clean water for everyone and conserving water by all. Read about this group started by a Presbyterian minister at bit.ly/GLLWCleanWater.
- 🌱 The sheep may refer to the earth, all creation, rather than the human population. Responsible stewardship of our planet is more important than ever. This makes the good shepherd any group that advocates for good stewardship of the earth. One well-known and established organization is the National Wildlife Federation. Learn about it at bit.ly/GLNWildlifeF.

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

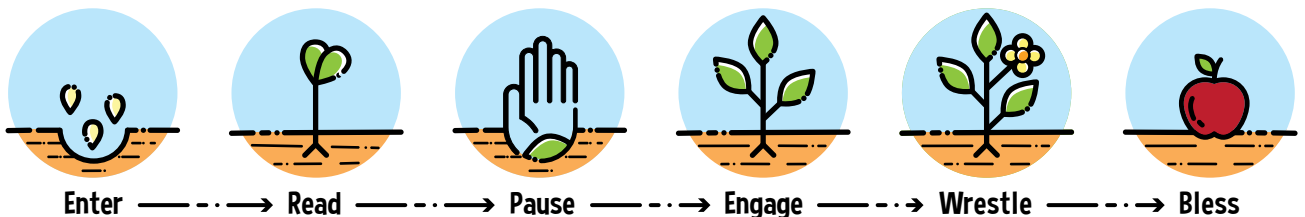
Few children in the United States have direct contact with sheep and shepherds. However, many do know about caring for a pet. Jesus’ clear words about how a good shepherd cares for the flock will not be lost on them. Even if they don’t understand how Jesus can care for them, children will add this image of Jesus (and God) to the portrait they are putting together of Jesus the Christ. Don’t underestimate the imagination of a child about being led safely by Jesus. This imagination is important to their developing spiritual life.

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

Put aside your adult responsibilities for a moment and think of yourself as a sheep of Jesus’ flock.

- 🌱 In bed before going to sleep, relax your body. Imagine that you are a member of the flock Jesus tends. Hear Jesus call you by name, bringing you into the sheepfold, and be assured that Jesus will keep you safe through the night.
- 🌱 Read Psalm 23. Then read it again slowly, taking time to see each image in your mind’s eye as you read it. Imagine yourself as the psalmist, writing these words. Conclude this meditation with a prayer of thanksgiving to God.
- 🌱 Knowing that we are in the care of the Good Shepherd may free us to be a good shepherd for others. Who in your community provides the safety net and care that a good shepherd provides for the sheep? How can you support or take part in the work of one of these organizations? Contact one such organization this week.

God who cares for each one of us, open my eyes to your care and my heart to be that care for others. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.



Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Toy sheep or picture of sheep
- ✓ Art supplies
- ✓ Internet-connected device
- ✓ Blank card stock or construction paper
- ✓ Copies of Resource Page 1

Preparing to Lead

Read the story from the Bible, John 10:11–16. The Common English Bible is often an accessible translation. As you read, note which aspects of the story you relate to and where questions are raised for you. Then read the story “The Good Shepherd” in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 328).

Think about the following as you engage with this text:

- ✓ What are the primary responsibilities of a shepherd?
- ✓ Who has shepherded you in your life? Who have you shepherded?
- ✓ How are humans like shepherds? How are humans like sheep?
- ✓ Where do you see God's love in this story?
- ✓ How does this story help you become closer to Jesus?

As you live alongside this text while you prepare for this session, think about how the idea of Jesus as the Good Shepherd challenges you. How are you encouraged by thinking about Jesus in this way?

As you prepare, remember the faces and names of the children you will teach. What do you know about them and their life situations? Pray for them.

As children gather, invite volunteers to create a comfortable seating area with items such as floor pillows, cushions, or bean bag chairs in a circle. Gather art supplies and place them where the children can reach them if they desire to use them. Place a stuffed or toy sheep in the center of the circle as a focal point.



Enter into sacred space together.

Gather the children in the seating area.

Invite them to repeat after you as you pray:

Holy God, surround us /
with your comforting love /
as we learn about your word /
and are guided by you. /
Amen.

Point out the art supplies. Encourage everyone to use them during the session for expressing themselves artistically as they engage with the story of Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

For children struggling with transitions, set clear expectations and let them know how long activities should take.



Read a story of God's people.

If you have younger children in your group, use comparisons to help them understand how Jesus described himself. Use examples like “a caring doctor” or “a kind teacher” if they are not sure what shepherds are. When Jesus was teaching, he wanted people to relate to the stories he was telling, so use examples that make sense to the children you have in your session.

Invite the children to listen to how Jesus described himself as the Good Shepherd.

Read the first paragraph of today's story, “The Good Shepherd” (p. 328).

Lead a conversation using the following prompts:

- ✓ How do people know about you?
- ✓ What words do you use to describe yourself?

Read the rest of the story.



Pause to let God's Word enter into hearts and minds.

Invite the children to be silent for a few moments to let the story find its way into their hearts, minds, and lives. Encourage them to use their curiosity and imagination as they consider this story.

Remind them that the art materials are available to use to express a word, image, or feeling they have from the story.



Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Engage the children in discussion about the story. Wonder together:

- ✦ How is Jesus like a shepherd? Who are Jesus' sheep?
- ✦ What does Jesus protect us from?
- ✦ Why do you think Jesus told the part about the bad shepherd as well as the good shepherd?
- ✦ What might cause a bad shepherd to help only themselves?
- ✦ Where else in the Bible have we heard stories about sheep?

Choose one or both options:

- Shepherd Song
 - ✦ Teach the children a song to help them remember that Jesus is the Good Shepherd.
 - ✦ Show the YouTube video "The Baa Baa Song (He's the Good Shepherd) — Sibling Harmony" (bit.ly/GLBaaBaaSong, 2:05).
 - ✦ As the children catch on, sing and dance to the song. Play it more than one time, as time allows.
- Guided Meditation
 - ✦ Invite the children to spread out around the room and find a comfortable spot to sit or lie down. Encourage the children to close their eyes if they feel comfortable doing so.
 - ✦ Lead the children in a guided meditation using the script below or by making up your own. Pause after each sentence or phrase to give the children a chance to imagine the scene.
 - ✦ When everyone has rejoined the circle, invite volunteers to share about their experience of the meditation.

✦ Script:

Imagine that you are lying on a hillside in a bed of tall, soft grass. You can feel the sun on your face and hear the bees buzzing near you. The air is clear and fresh, and you can see in every direction field after field of rich, green grass. Every now and then you see a bird fly between you and the great, puffy, white clouds.

As you gaze into the distance, you can see trees lining the pasture at the base of the hill. You know the wolves live there because you can hear them howling in the distance. You know you are safe because Jesus, your shepherd, is right there with you, standing guard over you.

Even so, after a few minutes, you can hear the wolves' howling coming even closer. Something seems to have woken them up and told them you are near. But Jesus is near, and he quickly builds a short fence between you and the wolves. You are safe.

Within a few minutes, though, the wolves get braver, coming closer. Jesus is alert, ready to protect you. With his shepherd's staff in hand, he chases the wolves back into the woods. He follows them deep into the trees, telling them that they will never be able to hurt you, his precious sheep.

He takes the wood from the fence around you and builds a new fence along the edge of the woods. He hikes back up the hill and sits next to you. Now the hillside is yours again. Now the pasture is safe. You have been protected by your Good Shepherd and are free to enjoy the sun, the wind, the sky, the clouds, the soft grass, and the birds' songs again. You know Jesus will continue to protect you.

[Pause.]

When you are ready, open your eyes and rejoin our circle.



Wrestle with our place in God's story.

Ask the children where they see themselves in the story. Are they the good shepherd, the bad shepherd, a sheep, someone listening to Jesus, or somewhere else in the story? Maybe they have been in different parts of the story in different parts of their life. Encourage the children to share how they relate to the story.

Choose one or both options:

- Sharing Stories and Gratitude
 - ✦ Tell stories about a time Jesus or one of his followers helped you. Invite the children to share their stories too. Discuss:
 - Who is a good shepherd to you? Who cares for you and helps you?
 - How are you a good shepherd? Who do you help and take care of?
 - ✦ Encourage the children to use the art supplies and card stock and construction paper to make a card for someone who has been like a good shepherd to them, such as doctors, nurses, babysitters, parents, pastors, or teachers. Encourage the children to deliver or mail their cards this week.
- Learning from the Shepherd
 - ✦ Hand out copies of Resource Page 1 and invite the children to complete the prompts with words or pictures.
 - ✦ Invite the children to share their responses and any art they made during the session.



Bless one another with God's grace.

Invite the children to share what they learned about Jesus throughout this session. Use the following prompts if desired:

- ✦ What does it mean for Jesus to be a good shepherd?
- ✦ How can you take care and protect others?
- ✦ How can you focus on following Jesus where he leads you?

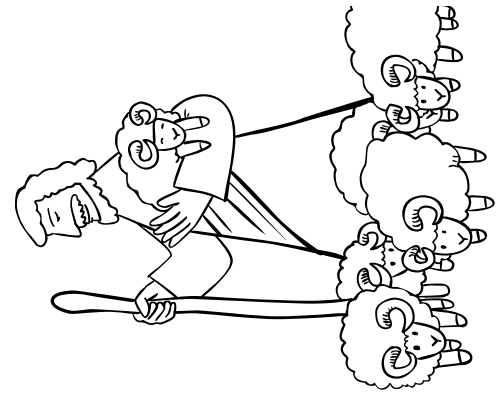
Close with the following prayer, inviting the children to repeat after you:

Holy God, /
you are the Good Shepherd. /
You care for us /
and lead us through our lives. /
Help us to be good examples for others /
and teach others to follow you. /
Amen. /



Grow with more.

- Sheep Tag
 - ✦ Outside or in a large room, invite the children to play a game of sheep tag.
 - ✦ Ask a volunteer to be the shepherd; all the other children are sheep.
 - ✦ As the shepherd tags sheep, have them join hands to form a flock. Each time a sheep is tagged, they join hands with the child at the end of the flock. Play until all sheep have been tagged and are part of the flock—now a full line of children!
- Pet Shepherds
 - ✦ Taking care of pets can be seen as a modern form of shepherding that many children engage in every day.
 - ✦ Invite the children to share about their pets and how they take care of them. Liken the children's caretaking to Jesus' care for us as the Good Shepherd.



I protect
others by ...

Jesus takes care
of me by ...

I take care of others by ...